Comanche and the Hardin Gang

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Notes by transcriber on 21 September 2025:

Many the erroneous or factually incorrect items in this, or any other document of the error is usually attributed to the lack of access to real records to prove or disprove claims. Rarely are these errors deliberate, but once made in decades prior, take on a life of their own, even when the actual records that are now available, clearly disprove them.

I am not related to Mollie Moore Godbold. Rather, I am a part of the Hardin family, which is the major focus of these two articles. My impetus is not to defend John Wesley Hardin or the other family members involved in the incident(s) described the following published articles. My personal opinion about them, follows closely to that of my Great-Grandmother (their cousin), who thought they were not people to look up to at all. She had a saying that I heard growing up, “Live by the gun, die by the gun”. She had real reasons to not look favorably on her outlaw kin and the violence that seemed to follow the Hardin family of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. That violence even claimed her older brother, John Barnett Hardin, Sr., in 1966. Since his demise, I cannot find any other of my family who went down the trail blazed in violence that was the legacy of John Wesley Hardin, Sr.

In the following document, where I am correcting something, I will annotate it inline. While the articles are factual, some of the specifics are not correct, but were difficult or impossible to validate at the time, due to records not being easily available. I will also put in other notations, which are relevant to my family’s story.

My family not only includes the Hardins discussed herein, but also includes my Great-Great Grandfather, Thomas Jefferson (Jeff) Simmons, Sr., who was a cattleman who lived in Erath County, then between Whon and Brownwood, Texas. He was also a member of the Texas Ranger Frontier Battalion (minute men) to protect against Comanche raids and outlawry. Jeff Simmons was a member of the posse that captured Joseph Gibson Hardin, Sr., Tom & Bud Dixon (all cousins of the Hardins, Mary Dixon Hardin), cornered and had a shootout with and, killing Alexander Hamilton “Ham” Anderson & Alexander Henry “Alec” Barekman, who were also cousins of John Wesley Hardin on his mother’s Dixon side. Jeff had married Sophenia Josephine Holder in 1865 at Waldrip (now a ghost town with only a bridge remaining), named for the Waldrip family mentioned in these articles.

In 1916 in Odell, Texas, Jeff's oldest son, Thomas Jefferson 'Tom' Simmons II, married Mamie Mae Hardin, cousin of John Wesley Hardin. Her father, John Jonathan Johnson Hardin had married Mary Elizabeth "Betty" Rhea, daughter of US Deputy Marshal John Deskin Rhea. So in my family, the out-laws became in-laws.

End Notes>>>

Part 1

THE NORTH CENTRAL TEXAS TOWN OF COMANCHE HAD A colorful early history. In this history was humor, pathos, courage and terror, events which show the best in men and events which show the worst. The most exciting decade in the history of the town was the 1870's. The most exciting year was 1874, when Charlie Webb, a deputy sheriff of Brown County, was killed in Comanche by the notorious gunman, John Wesley Hardin.

One who has read any of the numerous books or articles about Hardin, has read an account of this killing and its terrible aftermath, which made the shooting of Webb the costliest to the young gunman of the forty or more men he was said to have killed. One who has read any of the six or more books about Hardin has read the story from the viewpoint of the Hardin family, the author having shaped his account from Hardin's autobiography, The Life of John Wesley Hardin: As Written By Himself, or from material furnished by the Hardin family.

But there is a different version to be written. It is that of the pioneers who were living in Comanche when Webb was killed. Those best fitted to write this version-men and women who witnessed or had a part in what they could have told-are dead. At eighty-four I shall write the story for them as well as I can from incidents and facts related to me fifty or more years ago and a few incidents told me recently by some of their descendants. To get a true picture of Comanche in the 1870's one needs to know something of the early history of Comanche County.

A heavy toll is demanded of people who undertake the Herculean task of converting a wilderness into a homeland. This must be paid in loneliness, danger, privations, backbreaking toil, in finding means to solve problems that seem unsolvable, and in doing things without having adequate tools.

There was no Comanche County when the first of the colonists settled there in 1854. The land was Comanche territory, the heart of the winter range of the Comanche Indians. The colonists- the sturdy "briar-breakers" who broke the trail for those who would follow-were shut off from communication with settlements to the east by poor roads and lack of mail service. The nearest railroad was 300 miles away. The nearest market where general merchandise could be bought, Houston, was the same distance. The only recognized wagon road in the country was the military road laid out by Army engineers in 1849 or 1850, over which supplies were hauled from Fort Gates in Coryell County northwestward to Forts Griffin and Belknap. To obtain foodstuffs and material

not produced in the county-among these salt, sugar, coffee, meal, flour, boots, shoes, and such cloth as the women were not able to weave on homemade looms-it was necessary to make a round trip of approximately three hundred miles.

The trips were not made in high-powered cars over super- highways. They were made in tar-pole wagons drawn by five or six yoke of oxen over roads that were merely two deep ruts with stumps here and there down the middle. Streams had to be crossed which had no bridges. Sometimes on the return trips men who had been away from home for two or three months would get within a few miles of the settlement for which they were bound, only to find the Leon River on a rampage. They would have to camp for several weeks while waiting for the river to get low enough to ford. Meanwhile, their families, having run out of flour or meal, had not tasted bread for a month.

In 1858, the need to change the location of the county seat from the settlement of Cora to a place nearer the center of the county led to the birth of Comanche. By that time there were about ten small settlements in the county. These were some distance apart and covered considerable territory, land being cheap and the colonists wanting plenty of elbow room. A family that lived within thirty miles of another was looked on as a neighbor.

Though the Indians had not put out a welcome mat when the whites began coming into the county, it was not until 1857 that they showed hostility toward the settlers. This started with raids in which the Indians stole the livestock, mainly the horses, of the settlers. The raids increased in frequency and became murderous. By 1860, the situation became so serious that the colonists had to turn all their efforts to the problem of keeping alive. Growth was halted by Indian raids and by the War Between the States and the reconstruction period which followed, so that there was a gain in population of less than three hundred in all of Comanche County in the 1860's. In 1870, the county was given a shot in the arm when Texas was readmitted to the Union and immigrants began pouring into the state from war-ravaged states east of the Mississippi. In 1874, Comanche received another shot in the arm when the Indians of Northwest Texas were rounded up and put on reservations in the Indian Territory by General R. S. Mackenzie of the United States Army. For with the peril of Indian raids removed, West Texas was open for settlement, and Comanche was so situated as to be the gateway to that vast and little-known region.

Settlers came into the town in increasing numbers. Some stayed only long enough for their teams to rest, then pushed on farther west "where the old woman an' the kids can grow up with the country." Others came-a few Yankees among them-with the intention of making their home in the town or county, and remained to become valuable citizens. Some came who had shown no regard for the law or the lives or property of men in other places and would show no more in Comanche. Soon little Comanche, which a few years earlier had struggled to keep alive, took on a vitality that changed it into the "bristling, bustling, swaggering frontier town" that it remained through the rest of the 1870's.

In October, 1873, the editor of the newly-established weekly newspaper, the Comanche Chief, gave some statistics about the town. The town had 700 inhabitants, twenty places of business, one church, several organized branches of the church, a Masonic Lodge, an Odd Fellows Lodge and Encampment, and an organization known as the Friends of Temperance.

Unless the editor padded the population a bit, some of the citizens of the town must have been hiding in the bushes when the census was taken in 1880, the population at that time being only 704.

The railroads of Texas, which did little building during the war and the reconstruction period, began to build again in 1871.

In 1873, the nearest one was only 100 miles from Comanche. The town could be reached from the north on horseback by way of Fort Griffin and Fort Belknap and the Western Cattle Trail. It could be entered from the east over a road that was a single wagon trail cut through dense woods and so deep in sand it was difficult to travel.

In 1871, a black-haired, blue-eyed, dapper-looking young lawyer, Joe Hardin, moved to Comanche. He brought with him his wife and their baby daughter, Dora Dean Joe Belle Hardin. Ambitious and energetic, Joe was taking an active part in the affairs of the town by the time he had unpacked his saddlebags. He became a Mason, a member of the Friends of Temperance, and a real estate agent in addition to practicing law. A year or two later he was appointed postmaster.

Other members of the Hardin family moved to the town: Joe's parents, "Preacher" and Mrs. Hardin, their daughter Matt, their young son Jeff, and several other children. Some of Mrs. Hardin's nephews and their families also moved there. Among the nephews were Ham Anderson (Alexander Hamilton Anderson), Alec Barekman *(spelling corrected here and throughout to Barekman),* and Tom and Bud Dixon.

The pioneers of Comanche were a friendly folk. They welcomed the Hardins and made them feel at home. An especially warm handshake was given the family by stalwart Mart Fleming, who had known Preacher Hardin's brother Bob when he lived in Brenham.

The Hardin family had long been prominent in Texas. Men of the generation just older than that of Preacher Hardin had held important offices and performed notable services for the state. ~~One had signed the Texas Declaration of Independence; another had fought in the Battle of San Jacinto~~. ~~And Preacher Hardin's father had served in the Texas Congress that worked out the details for annexation of Texas by the United States.~~ *(The legislator was from a different, distantly related Hardin family in Polk County Texas – Benjamin Watson Hardin – not of JWH's family). BDW*

About April 28, 1874, another member of the Hardin clan came to Comanche, a harmless-looking young man with slightly curly hair and fathomless gray eyes, Preacher Hardin's outlaw son John Wesley Hardin.

From what has been written about the killers of the "Old West" the surest way for one of the gunslingers to become marshal of some wild and woolly town-and to be pictured as a hero in books and on television seven or eight decades later- was to have more notches on his gun than any other of the bad boys who reached the town two jumps ahead of a posse. That John Wesley Hardin was not made marshal of any of the shoot-'em-up towns in which he lived briefly was not for the lack of notches on his gun. He was just too busy adding to the number to serve in that capacity.

The young gunman was never a resident of Comanche. With his wife Jane and their baby daughter Molly he had made several visits to relatives there in 1873. When he came there in April, 1874, bringing his friend Jim Taylor with him, it was the second time he had been in the town since the first of the year. His wife and baby were already in Comanche, having come there with Joe Hardin and Alec Barekman when they returned from a visit to John Wesley at his cow camp in Gonzales County.

A year earlier Hardin had been drawn into the Sutton-Taylor feud, in which nine men had been killed in one night in Cuero, the center of the feud. Hardin had tried to keep out of the feud. When drawn into it, he immediately became leader of the Taylor faction, a place left vacant by the murder of Pitkin Taylor, the father of Jim and Billy Taylor, by members of the Sutton gang. On May 5, 1873, Hardin and Taylor killed badman-cowboy Jack Helm who, with Bill Sutton, led the Sutton faction. In April, 1874, shortly before Hardin and Taylor came to Comanche, Sutton had been shot to death by Jim and Billy Taylor, as had Gabe Slaughter, a stranger who was so unfortunate as to have been with Sutton at the time he was killed.

Sutton and Slaughter were killed while Joe Hardin and Alec Barekman were visiting John Wesley at his cow camp. Though neither they nor John Wesley fired any of the shots that took the lives of the men, all three had a hand in their murder. Jim Taylor had sworn to kill Sutton, and John Wesley wanted him killed. But Sutton, averse to being a target for the gunman buddies, had been keeping out of their way.

In early March or April, 1874, Sutton started a herd of cattle up the Chisholm Trail. Sutton himself was to go from Indianola, Texas, to New Orleans by the steamer Clinton, and then on to Kansas by train to meet his trail crew when they arrived there.

Sutton's plan offered an opportunity for Jim Taylor to kill Sutton. But to carry out a plot that had been made, it was necessary for Taylor to know what time Sutton would leave for New Orleans. Taylor could not go to Indianola and scout for the information himself without arousing Sutton's suspicion. Hardin could not take time to scout for it as he was getting a herd of cattle ready for the trail. But there were Joe Hardin and Alec Barekman. Telling them that Sutton was his "deadly enemy" and must be killed, John Wesley delegated them to go to Indianola and get the information Taylor wanted.

Having been informed as to the day and hour Sutton would take the steamer, Jim and Billy Taylor followed him on board the Clinton where they shot both him and Gabe Slaughter. Then the Taylor brothers raced down the gangplank, jumped on the fast

horses saddled and waiting for them, and rode to Cuero, sixty miles away. Early the next morning they rode to John Wesley Hardin's cow camp.

Evidently Billy Taylor's stay at the camp was short. Jim was still there when Hardin finished putting the trail brand on his herd and started it up the trail to Wichita, Kansas, with Joe Clements, one of his cousins, in charge. Hardin was to meet the herd somewhere near Wichita in June. On his way to Kansas, he was to spend a week with *his wife and other relatives in Comanche.*

With the herd off their hands, Hardin and Taylor decided to start another. Likely, this was at the suggestion of Taylor. Some of his friends were going up the trail, and when Hardin left for Comanche and Kansas, Jim would be more alone than was wise in a section where he had many enemies. Too, Billy Taylor had been arrested for the assassination of Sutton and Slaughter and was in jail in Galveston, and a reward of 500 dollars had been offered for the arrest of Jim.

In about two weeks the second herd of approximately one thousand longhorns was ready for the trail. A Dr. Brocious *(James Monroe "Doc" Brokius – related by marriage to JWH's wife)*, a man of mystery from what has been written about him, was put in charge. He was instructed to drive the cattle up the trail by way of Hamilton, a town twenty-five miles southeast of Comanche. When the herd reached Hamilton, Brokius was to send word to Hardin at the home of his parents in Comanche.

About April 23, Hardin and Taylor started to Comanche from the town of Gonzales, taking three race horses with them.

In the summer of 1909 or 1910, for no special reason, I asked my father to tell me what he knew about John Wesley Hardin. He complied by telling me the few things about the gunman that I had known since childhood. "That's about all I know about him," he said. "But John Carnes can tell you as much about him as any man in Comanche County. He was sheriff when Hardin was here. I'm going to see John this afternoon. Why don't you go with me?"

An hour or so later, I asked ex-Sheriff Carnes why Hardin, if he was wanted in DeWitt County, wasn't arrested when he came to Comanche. Carnes said:

"We had no place to keep him. We didn't have a jail then. The building we used for a jail-one built for a store-wouldn't have held a man like Hardin any longer than it took to put him there. I wrote the sheriff of DeWitt County that Hardin was in Comanche, hopin' he wanted him bad enough to take him off our hands. But mails were slow in those days. Sometimes a letter would be a month or six weeks old by the time it reached the man it was written to."

Not much has been told about the activities of Hardin and Taylor during the weeks they were in Comanche prior to the killing of Webb. It would be difficult to add to the little that is known. Likely they spent a few hours each day grooming and exercising the race horses, Rondo, Shiloh, and Doc. And since both men drank and gambled it is safe to

say that when they were not at Preacher Hardin's home, two miles northwest of Comanche, or at Logan's Gap, where they had cattle, they spent more time in the saloons of Comanche than they did in working for the Friends of Temperance.

On one occasion Hardin, being in a playful mood or having had too much to drink, fired a shot into the ground at the feet of a group of teen-age school girls he chanced to meet.

"We saw the men riding toward us but were so busy talking we didn't pay any attention to who they were until it was too late to run," one of the group said when talking of the incident forty or so years later. "But when John Wesley Hardin fired that shot," the woman paused, shook her head and smiled wryly at the memory, "we surely sifted the sand in our hurry to get away from there."

About May 5, Joe Hardin and a group of men went to Brown County to get some cattle Joe owned but over which there had been litigation. The possibility that he might not get possession of the cattle easily led Joe to take Bill Cunningham, a deputy sheriff, along, though the latter had no jurisdiction in Brown County. Jim Taylor and John Wesley Hardin went along too, maybe for the ride, maybe to add the weight of their six shooters and reputations to Joe's claim to the cattle.

The men-Bill Cunningham, Jim Milligan, Jim Taylor, the Hardin brothers, and their cousins Jim and Ham Anderson, Alec Barekman, and Tom and Bud Dixon-got possession of the cattle and started home with them without having any trouble. When night overtook them they stopped at Logan's Gap, about ten miles southwest of Comanche, to pen the herd at a ranch owned by a Mrs. Waldrip.

While at the supper table that night John Wesley Hardin heard the name Charlie Webb for the first time.

There is a wide difference between what Hardin has written in his autobiography and what is told in a recapitulation of the testimony of Bill Cunningham, a witness for the State at the trial of Hardin.

Hardin wrote:

“At the supper table Mrs. Waldrup told us how one Charles Webb, a deputy sheriff of Brown County, had come to her house and arrested Jim Buck Waldrup [her son] and had cursed and abused her. She told him that no gentleman would curse a woman. Of course, we all agreed with her. There is no doubt but that we all sympathized with Mrs. Waldrup, who had been so abused by Charles Webb.”

The recapitulation of Bill Cunningham's testimony was in an issue of the Comanche Chief published nearly a half-century ago.

When we sat down to supper the lady of the house [Mrs. Waldrip] told the crowd that Charlie Webb had arrested her son, and if she could, she would have killed him. One of the party said they would get rid of him for her when they got him to the right place. There was a great deal of talking and juggling about this and other matters during the night.

In the recapitulation of Cunningham's testimony the name of the man alleged to have said "they" would get rid of Webb for Mrs. Waldrip is not given. It is supplied by John Wesley Hardin in what he wrote in his autobiography in angry denial of Cunningham's testimony. The name was that of Joe Hardin.

When Hardin was tried for killing Webb, the State charged that a conspiracy to kill the deputy sheriff was formed at the supper at Mrs. Waldrip's that night. While the State was unable to substantiate the charge, what was said that night and repeated later-probably with exaggerations-definitely had a part in creating the enmity that arose between Hardin and the deputy sheriff of Brown County.

The cattle Joe Hardin brought from Brown County had been sold to Jim Taylor and John Wesley Hardin and were to be added to the herd the two gunmen had started up the trail just before they came to Comanche. The cattle were to be held at Logan's Gap, on the open range there, until Hardin was notified by Brokius that the herd of which he had charge had reached Hamilton.

One day in May, when there were more people in Comanche than usual, District Court being in session, Davis, a cowboy with the herd at Logan's Gap, came to town and, after taking a few drinks, became so rowdyish in his behavior that he was warned by Marshal J. W. Greene that he must quiet down or he would be placed under arrest.

Davis promised to behave. Instead, he returned to the saloon, added to his drinks, and was soon back on the square whooping, yelling, and acting worse than he had before. When Greene went to the cowboy to arrest him, Davis leveled a revolver on the marshal before the latter had time to draw his own gun.

"Don't shoot. Davis! Don't shoot!" shouted Henry Ware from a distance of twenty or so feet.

With his revolver still trained on the marshal, Davis glanced involuntarily in the direction of Ware. This gave Greene the opportunity to jerk out his own pistol. As the cowboy turned his attention back to the marshal, Greene fired.

No bill was found against the marshal. "There was only a hair- breadth difference in time as to which would have shot first, Davis or Greene," agreed the hundred or so men who had witnessed what had taken place.

Not long after he and Taylor came to Comanche, Hardin arranged for some horse races to be run on a track about a mile and a half northeast of town. The date set for the races, May 26, was Hardin's twenty-first birthday and was about three weeks after the

Hardin party spent the night at the Waldrip ranch. During these weeks trouble had been brewing between John Wesley Hardin and Webb, though they had never met.

Webb, it was whispered, had been saying in Brown County that if John Carnes was afraid to arrest the notorious John Wesley Hardin, he, Webb, would go to Comanche and arrest him. On hearing this, the Hardin gang, as Hardin and his associates were known in Comanche, declared loudly and profanely that John Wesley Hardin was able to take care of himself. If not, there were plenty of people ready to help him.

Fanned by rumors, including those of threats, the enmity between the gunman and the deputy sheriff had grown until but little more was needed to bring it to a head. The "little" was added the day of the races by the rumor that Charlie Webb had come to Comanche with fifteen Brown County deputy sheriffs to kill Taylor and arrest John Wesley Hardin.

The races Hardin had arranged were advertised throughout Comanche County and other counties in its vicinity by the businessmen of Comanche, who at the same time took the opportunity to advertise their own services or wares. When the day came the town was crowded with visitors. It was a big day in Comanche, and until late that afternoon it was a big day for John Wesley Hardin.

Some fifty years ago, in telling of incidents relative to Hardin, a pioneer woman of Comanche declared that the young desperado had the fastest horses in the world. As "the world" covers considerable territory, it is reasonable to suppose that the woman was stretching the blanket a bit in saying that Hardin had the fastest horses in the world. But there is no doubt that the three he entered in the races that fateful May 26-Rondo, his own horse; Doc, Bud Dixon's; and Shiloh, Joe Hardin's-were the fastest in Comanche or in the county. They swept the field.

Everything from money to horses, wagons, and six-shooters had been bet on the races and luck had been with Hardin and his friends. Hardin himself had won 3,000 dollars in cash, fifty head of cattle, a wagon or two, and fifteen saddle horses. He and his pals were in a mood to celebrate when, whooping and firing their pistols into the air, they raced their horses back to Comanche.

Webb had been pointed out to Hardin at the racetrack. There is no evidence to show that the harmless looking young gunman had been pointed out to the deputy sheriff.

In his autobiography Hardin said that he had heard that Charlie Webb had come to Comanche with fifteen men from Brown County to kill him, Hardin, and to "capture" Jim Taylor. "He [Webb] did not make any breaks at the racetracks, but when we all came back to town he swore time and again that he would kill me and capture Taylor, and that this would be done before the sun went down."

Did Webb make the threats Hardin has alleged that he made? If not, who was responsible for putting them into circulation? Was it someone with a craving for excitement, or the Hardin gang, who took this means to provide their leader with an excuse to kill the deputy sheriff? Or were the threats a lie put into circulation by persons

who held a grudge against Webb or Hardin and who sought to get rid of one or the other by adding to the feeling of antagonism that already existed between the two men?

In the opinion expressed by reputable pioneers of Comanche, Webb was a quiet man, a good officer of the law. If he had in mind killing Hardin and arresting Taylor, would he have chosen a time as unfavorable as that of the day of the races? Knowing the reputation of the two gunmen, would he have courted death at their hands by broadcasting his intentions? It is far more logical to believe that the deputy sheriff came to Comanche for the same reason that brought hundreds of other men there: to meet friends and enjoy the excitement of the races.

But Hardin, Taylor, and their associates were not taking any chances. On the day of the races they were seen coming toward the square from the direction of the Joe Hardin home, loading the shotguns they were carrying.

Passing behind the small building on the east side of the square, the office of the Comanche Chief, the men went through a vacant building next door and walked out into the square, still carrying their guns.

Preacher Hardin was waiting there as if he had had word they were coming. Hurrying to them, he talked to them earnestly. Some eyewitnesses have told that he prayed. Whatever he said, it was strong enough in its appeal to persuade the men to reenter the building and stack their guns in a corner.

But they did not put away the pistols they had concealed on their bodies. And some, including John Wesley Hardin, had more than one, as was shown by their actions some hours later.

After the races, Hardin and his associates had been going from bar to bar spending their easy-come-by money. At one place, Hardin threw a handful of twenty dollar gold pieces on the counter and invited everybody to come up for a drink. The money was picked up and handed back to the young gunman by a friend who warned him that he was drinking too much and would not be able to protect himself "if a scrap came."

But Hardin continued to drink. In time he was so drunk he was reeling and was as quarrelsome as he was drunk. The whole group had become so boisterous and disorderly that the owners of the saloons they were patronizing were uneasy and asked Sheriff Carnes to do something to quiet the men. The sheriff sent Frank Wilson, one of his deputies, to the men with his orders to get out of town before they caused trouble.

It was then late in the afternoon and Hardin and his companions were at the Jack Wright saloon. The owner of the saloon was not an ordinary saloon keeper. As described by Joel Nabers, a contemporary, "He was a man among men. Always a leader, cool and self-possessed, with a clear conception of right, he was fearless in his discharge of duty."

Jack Wright had organized and was captain of the Comanche County Minute Men during the War Between the States. Later he was captain of the Rangers who brought law and order to Comanche after the most exciting, fear-ridden period of its history.

In his autobiography Hardin said that the Jack Wright saloon was situated on the northwest corner of the square, with its front door facing to the east. The location given by Hardin and by books and articles about the gunman in which the authors have used the autobiography as the main source for material, is that of the saloon when Hardin was brought back to Comanche for trial. There is a photograph to show that the saloon was on the northwest corner in 1880, and an advertisement to show that it was there in 1879. But when Webb was killed the saloon was on the northeast corner of the square. The information given by ex-Sheriff Carnes, Jim Nabers, and other pioneer citizens is substantiated by a letter written in 1897 by G. A. Beeman, the first publisher of the Comanche Chief, and reprinted in the Golden Anniversary Edition, published on June 6, 1924.

To pinpoint the location of the saloon, these men have either written or said, "It was just where the First National Bank [which used to be on the northeast corner of the square] is now."

The saloon faced south. There was a door in front, one in the rear, and one that opened on a vacant lot between the saloon and the side street to the east.

When Deputy Sheriff Wilson, a son-in-law of Jack Wright, went to the saloon, Hardin had just invited the crowd to the bar for another drink. Wilson told Hardin he wanted to speak with him. They went outside. After they had walked about ten steps Hardin stopped, saying they had gone far enough.

"You and the boys had better go home. These are the sheriff's orders," Wilson said. "You are drinking and we don't want anything started that might turn into a fight. We don't want any trouble."

Hardin argued that nothing was going to happen.

"It's a violation of the law to carry a pistol," he was reminded.

"Oh, I'm not carrying a pistol," Hardin lied. "See?" He threw open his coat. "My pistol is in the saloon, behind the bar."

Not having X-ray eyes, Wilson could not see the six-shooter hidden under the gunman's vest, nor the Smith and Wessons picked up by Jack Wright and Joel Nabers where the desperado mounted the horse on which he made his escape after he killed Webb. Not knowing how skillful Hardin was at concealing weapons on his body, the deputy sheriff did not search him, which probably was lucky for Wilson if he put the proper value on his life. Hardin promised to go home as soon as Jeff, his younger brother, brought Joe's buggy to him.

A group of men were standing on the east side of the saloon within earshot of the place where Hardin and Wilson were talking. Just inside the saloon, near the front door, was G. W. Tolbert, the owner of a livery stable, who had come to the saloon to collect a bill Hardin owed him for taking care of a horse. Waiting outside the saloon, at the left of Hardin, was Hode Carnes, a brother of the sheriff.

As Hardin and Wilson were about to go into the saloon, they were met by Jim Taylor, who, even before Wilson went there to deliver the sheriff's orders, had been trying to persuade Hardin to go home.

Suddenly somebody exclaimed, "Here comes that damned Brown County sheriff!"

Hardin has told that it was Dave Carnes who uttered the words. If this is true, it was a strange way for Dave to speak of the deputy sheriff. Dave was a son of "Uncle" Dickie Carnes, as were Hode and Sheriff John Carnes. A half-century ago a member of Uncle Dickie's family said that Webb was coming to the saloon to meet Hode, who was waiting there to take him to his father's home, where the deputy sheriff was to have supper.

Hardin had already seen the deputy sheriff, as is evident from an excerpt taken from his autobiography.

I looked to the south and saw a man, a stranger to me, with two six-shooters on coming toward us. I said to Frank:

"Let's go back to the saloon. I want to pay my bill and then go home."

As Webb had been pointed out to Hardin at the race track, he must have recognized the "stranger." His main reason for wanting to go back to the saloon may have been for the purpose of getting with Taylor and others of his friends.

At the trial of Hardin, Tolbert, a witness for the State, testified that he and Hardin were in the front door of the saloon. Taylor just behind them, when he saw Webb coming along the street. Hardin turned to Taylor, who had moved up, and, indicating Webb, said, "Did you ever see anything coming up finer in your life?" What Hardin said must have been spoken in an undertone. No other witness seemed to have heard it.

If Hardin went into the saloon, he and Taylor had come outside by the time the Brown County deputy sheriff drew near. Bud Dixon also had come out of the barroom. He was standing at the right of Hardin, Taylor at his left. Other men who had been standing near Hardin had drawn back as if to give him room. Nobody was talking. All eyes were focused on Webb, walking toward them unhurriedly, his head lowered slightly, two pistols in the holsters that hung from his belt, hands behind his back. When he was within about five feet of Hardin, the gunman called out sharply, "Are you the sheriff of Brown County?"

Lifting his head slightly, half turning his face, Webb gazed at the killer from under his heavy brows as he took his own time in answering. "No, I'm the deputy sheriff."

"Do you have papers for my arrest?"

"I don't even know you."

"I'm the notorious John Wesley Hardin, the desperado, as people call me," Hardin said boastfully, with a motion of his hands. "I'm considered an outlaw, but I always carry the documents to protect myself."

Whatever emotion Webb may have felt, he kept hidden as he studied Hardin's face.

"What's in your hand behind your back?"

"A cigar." The deputy sheriff swung his hand forward and opened it to show the stump of a cigar.

"I've been told that you said Sheriff Carnes was no sheriff or he wouldn't allow me to stay around Comanche with my murdering pals," Hardin went on, drunk and determined to pick a fight.

"I've never made any such statement. So far as I know, Mr. Carnes has always discharged his duty."

"Well, you people of Brown County have said that John Carnes is no sheriff and no man. What about that?"

Webb had begun to show signs of being nettled by Hardin's persistent questioning. "I know nothing about the talk and I am not responsible for what the people of Brown County are saying,' he retorted.

P. H. Thurmond, a lawyer and a friend of Webb's, had been standing in the street when he saw Webb coming toward the saloon. The lawyer crossed the street and stopped a little distance from where Hardin and Webb were talking. He called to Webb, intending to ask the latter to have supper with him.

"You'd better go on. We're not through with him yet," Hardin told the lawyer arrogantly. Webb turned as if to go to Thurmond. Hardin caught hold of his arm. "You can't go off and leave me this way," he said angrily.

From what Webb said in reply, the gunman must have added something that implied that he, Webb, was afraid of him.

"No, goddamn you. I'm not afraid of you," the deputy sheriff blazed back.

As he spoke he made a sweeping downward motion with his hand. When the hand came up it held a pistol. Hardin, Dixon, and Taylor had drawn their six-shooters as quickly as Webb. Hardin and Webb fired so nearly at the same time that they seemed to

have fired simultaneously. The bullet from Hardin's six-shooter struck Webb in the face; that from Webb's pistol grazed the fleshy part of Hardin's leg.

Webb's pistol was new and had a hair trigger. He was not used to it. The weapon discharged prematurely as he got it out of the holster, and at an angle of about forty-five degrees. If he had had time to take aim the story might have had a different ending, so far as Hardin himself was concerned. But if Webb had killed Hardin he would have been killed by Taylor and Dixon, both of whom shot him as he was falling against the wall of the saloon.

The deputy sheriff went down on one knee. Dying as he was, he rested his pistol on his other knee and fired again. This shot went wild. His knees buckled, his shoulder rested against the wall of the saloon for a second, then slid to the ground. Charlie Webb was dead.

Years later, Judge H. R. Lindsay, one of the attorneys for the prosecution at the trial of Hardin, told a reporter on the Comanche Chief that he did not think that Hardin intended to kill Webb but merely wanted to scare him. If this is true, the gunman chose the wrong man to scare and in doing so brought woe on himself and on the whole Hardin family.

Hardin himself told Sheriff Carnes that Webb was the bravest man he had ever killed.

When the firing began, the men near the saloon scattered. When it ended, there was no one on the spot except Hardin, Taylor, Bud Dixon, Deputy Sheriff Frank Wilson, and the fatally wounded Webb. Hardin has told that Wilson attempted to draw his gun but he, Hardin, covered him as soon as he shot Webb, and ordered him to throw up his hands, which Wilson did. There is nothing to this effect in Wilson's testimony.

Pistol in hand, Hardin backed toward the saloon. Wilson testified that the gunman called to Taylor and Bud Dixon to "Fill up [the pistols], boys, and hold the house." Another witness testified that he shouted to them to "Shoot 'em, every damn one."

Whatever he called out, Hardin had told Taylor and Dixon to fight rather than to submit to arrest.

Before Hardin reached the saloon he changed his mind. "I'll give up to Wilson," he said. On seeing Sheriff Carnes, he changed his mind again. "No, I'll give up to Carnes."

On the afternoon I went with my father to see John Carnes- the only time I talked with him-the ex-sheriff was in bed, propped up by pillows, having been sick for some time with an illness from which he did not recover. His big frame was gaunt, his usually florid face pallid, but he talked readily.

After he answered my question as to why Hardin had not been arrested when he came to Comanche, he told me of a plan that had been made to arrest both Hardin and Taylor. Though Carnes made no mention of the races and I knew nothing about them at the time, it was evident that the plan was formed the day of the races and was to have been put into effect that night.

"The boys got to rowdyin' around so that something had to be done," Carnes said. "We felt that if we could arrest Hardin and Taylor we wouldn't have much trouble with the rest of the boys." The best way to get Hardin and Taylor apart was through their love of gambling.

The general meeting place of Comanche was in front of the post office when the stage came in with the mail. While waiting for the stage, certain men were to get up two games of poker. These were to be played in saloons or gambling halls some distance apart. Hardin was to be asked to take a hand in one game, Taylor in the other. At a given signal pistols were to be drawn on the two gunmen and an attempt made to arrest them before they had time to reach for their own guns.

"That afternoon my pistol was out of order," Carnes continued after telling me of the plot. "I was on my way to a gun- smith to have it fixed when I saw Charlie Webb going into the Jack Wright saloon. Another man was with me. When we saw Webb we stopped. We were about where the Scurry store is now," Carnes explained, naming a store a few doors west of the original site of the saloon. "Hardin was at the saloon. There had been trouble between him and Webb. When we saw Webb goin' there we smelt trouble."

At the sound of the shots between Hardin and Webb, men began hurrying across the square in the direction of the Jack Wright saloon. When they saw who was doing the shooting, they fell back.

Holding his useless six-shooter in one hand, Sheriff Carnes went to Hardin and told him to hand over his pistol. Hardin handed it to him. Deputies had relieved Taylor and Bud Dixon of their weapons and were disarming other members of the Hardin gang as they came out of the saloon. Finally all the men had come out, except one, a man so drunk that he could not have found his own nose with a square and compass.

Carnes had been holding his own pistol in one hand, Hardin's in the other. When the last man staggered out of the saloon. Carnes dropped his gun to search him. Knowing that his pistol was empty, Hardin took advantage of the action by whipping two pistols from under him arms and retreating into the saloon with Jim Taylor, Bud Dixon, and others of his followers.

Evidently the members of the gang had not been searched when told to hand over their weapons. Bud Dixon and Alec Barekman produced guns after they were inside the saloon.

Word that Webb had been killed by Hardin had been shouted around the square, then a scene of wild excitement. Men were yelling for Hardin to be lynched; other men were pleading that the law be allowed to take its course. Sheriff Carnes, armed with a double-barreled shotgun, stationed himself in front of the saloon where he attempted to bar the way of the infuriated mob trying to break into the building. Inside the saloon, John Wesley Hardin had a crowd lined up against the wall. On the square Preacher Hardin

and his son Joe were seen hurrying toward the saloon carrying shotguns, and were turned back by grim-faced men trying to restore order.

After a hurried parley, Hardin and his friends decided to make a break through the side door of the saloon for some horses tied to a hitching rack across the street. They made the break so suddenly that they had raced across the street, cut the ropes, mounted the horses and were riding away without a shot being fired at them, except by Henry Ware, who shot at them as he ran after them on foot.

Sheriff Carnes had been overpowered and the shotgun taken from him. He pushed his way through the crowd, picking up his deputies and deputizing other men to form a body to protect the retreat of the outlaws, knowing that Hardin and Taylor would be lynched if caught.

Presently a wild chase was underway with Hardin and Taylor in the lead, Anderson and Bud Dixon lagging behind to exchange shots with their pursuers, and Sheriff Carnes and his deputies in the rear shouting orders in the name of the law.

Hardin and his associates had fled northwestward on the old stage and wagon road which ran in front of the Todd home, two blocks from the square. Eighty-nine year old Sam Todd wrote me recently that he, his mother, and his three older sisters were "right in the middle of the big fight between the mob and the Hardin clan" that afternoon. "Mother has said many times that the popping off of guns on both the east side and the west side of the house nearly drove her crazy," Sam wrote. "No one was hurt, but the top panes of two windows were broken and many slugs were buried in the walls of rawhide lumber. I was at play in the yard when Mother ran out to look for me. I had crawled into a log room back of the main house by the time she found me. She dragged me out by the feet. I was only two years old, but I was as wild and as scared as a Comanche papoose, and I knew enough to hunt for a place of safety."

The chase was not carried on long before it was abandoned temporarily, probably because the men in pursuit needed to get better weapons.

On the day of the races, Marshal J. W. Greene and his bride, the former Dora Nabers, were returning to Comanche in an open- top buggy from their honeymoon trip to Dallas. Late that after- noon, about two miles east of town, they came across Joe Hardin. He was on horseback and was plainly excited.

Holding up a gun to stop the couple, he asked, "Jeff, have you seen the boys?"

"No, I haven't seen a soul," the marshal told him.

"Well, the town has been shot up and Webb has been killed," Joe said, giving Marshal Greene and his bride the first news they had received of the killing.

Hardin has told in his autobiography that after seeing that he, Taylor, and Barekman were safely out of town, Bud Dixon and Ham Anderson met them at the home of Preacher Hardin. They were joined there by Preacher Hardin, Joe Hardin, and Sheriff Carnes. According to Hardin, who had a great fear of mob violence, he was willing to surrender, but was told by the sheriff that he could not protect him with the feeling against him as high as it was. He was advised by Carnes to stay around until the excitement had abated, and then come in and give himself up.

Hardin, with Taylor, Barekman, and Anderson, decided to go into hiding at Round Mountain, about eight miles west of Comanche. They left for that place too hurriedly to take food with them, but Joe was to bring them a supply the next morning. At the same time he was to bring two saddle horses to be exchanged for those Hardin and Taylor had mounted when they broke from the Jack Wright saloon.

The next morning Joe did not come as early as expected. When the hours dragged by and they had no word from him, the men became hungry and impatient. Barekman and Anderson wanted to go to Comanche and see about the situation. Likely the excitement had simmered down and Joe did not think it necessary to come, they argued. Taylor, who on the previous day had wanted to charge the mob on the square, was in a mood to ride into town and fight it out with anybody who did not greet them with a smile of welcome and a cordial "Well, boys, I see you're back." But Hardin was more cautious. "We'd better wait till Joe comes," he counseled, "and be guided by what Joe has to report."

It was almost noon before Joe arrived. The two Dixon brothers were with him. They had brought food, the two horses, and bad news.

Joe's face was haggard. They would have to remain in hiding a long time, he told the men. The mob was everywhere around his father's home and his own. It had taken him and the Dixon brothers all morning to get to Round Mountain. They had to ride fifteen miles out of the way in order to elude men who were watching their movements.

Joe suggested several places where Wes and his companions could hide if safety demanded that they change from one spot to another. He, Joe, would find them wherever they were and would keep them informed as to what was going on.

About an hour after Joe and the Dixon brothers left for Comanche, leading the two horses they were to return to their owners, John Wesley saw a posse circling Round Mountain. This meant that Joe and his companions had been trailed and that the hiding place of the fugitives was known. As they had not been spotted yet, the men remained hidden in the dense under- brush until they had a chance to cut behind the posse. Then they rode to one of the places Joe had suggested as a retreat. Since my visit to ex-Sheriff Carnes was a surprise, he had nothing prepared in advance to tell me about John Wesley Hardin. In talking about him, he told me just what came into his mind. Had I asked some questions that afternoon, instead of merely listening, Carnes might have given me some information I should like to have but which it is too late to get.

But I had read nothing about Hardin then, and I had not heard enough about him to know how notorious he was. Furthermore, I had no thought of ever writing about him. My only interest in him came from his having played a part in local history, a subject in which I had become somewhat interested when gathering reminiscences for a paper to read at a Comanche County Old Settlers' Reunion.

Carnes gave the briefest account of what took place in the first hours after Webb was killed. In this account he did not mention the excitement on the square or his efforts to protect Hardin and Taylor from mob violence. Nor did he tell of going to Preacher Hardin's home with the minister and Joe Hardin, or that John Wesley had offered to surrender if he could be protected. Instead, he related some facts and events that John Wesley Hardin omitted when writing his autobiography and which the Hardin family has omitted in giving their version of what took place in Comanche. These things put a different light on or contradict some of the things that have been told.

Members of the Hardin family were kept under close surveillance to prevent them from giving information or aid to the fugitives. A morning or so after Webb was killed, when two women of the family were seen getting into a buggy and driving off, they were followed. After the women had been driving about in a seemingly aimless way until they were nearing the outskirts of Comanche, they were stopped. When asked where they were going, they replied they were taking a bundle of washing to "Aunt" ---, naming a colored washerwoman of the town. "We'd like to see the washing," one of the deputies said. Over the protests of the women the bundle was opened. Among the rags, garments, and household linens it held were the guns and ammunition the women had been trying to smuggle to the outlaws.

Soon after their visit to John Wesley and his companions at Round Mountain, Joe Hardin and the Dixon brothers were put under technical arrest and confined in the makeshift jail in Comanche. About the same time, Preacher and Mrs. Hardin and such of their children as were still living under their roof were taken to town. This was done partly for their protection and partly that a trap might be set for John Wesley and Jim Taylor at the Hardin home.

When two days passed without a visit or a word from Joe, John Wesley became worried. He wanted news about Jane and Mollie; he wanted to know whether Doc Brokius had sent word that the Hardin-Taylor herd of which he was in charge had reached Hamilton. He was also in pain from the gunshot wound inflicted by Webb, which had not received proper care. He and Taylor decided to run the risk of going to Preacher Hardin's home.

Unless the gunmen went to the Hardin home twice, there are two versions of what took place after they arrived: the version in a book by a well-known Texas writer who was furnished material by the Hardin family, and the one related by ex-Sheriff Carnes and other pioneers of Comanche.

In the version as given in the book, John Wesley and Taylor went to the Hardin home on a cloudy night when a drizzle was falling. All they could see was a light in the house and a camp- fire in the yard. But the sound of activity in the yard told them that at least thirty men and horses were on the place. As Hardin and Taylor edged closer, Taylor's horse stumbled over the stump of a tree. At the noise the animal made in regaining its foot-hold, a man yelled. Then guns roared and bullets whistled close to Hardin and Taylor, who wheeled their horses and lost no time in getting away.

In the version related by Sheriff Carnes about a dozen men were stationed in the Hardin home. They were left without mounts, the Hardin house occupying a spot where horses could not be hidden. A slender young chap, wearing a sunbonnet and dressed in Mrs. Hardin's clothes, acted as a decoy, showing him- self freely about the house and the yard.

The hours dragged by with no sign of the outlaws. Becoming bored and impatient, the men stacked their guns in a corner and were playing cards when Hardin and Taylor rode up. The men scrambled for their guns, but it was too late. The noise they made had frightened the two outlaws and they were galloping off, leaving a group of crestfallen men to fire useless shots after them and to curse their own stupidity.

An incident that lends humor to the version related to me fifty or more years ago was told me recently by Mrs. F. L. Little of Comanche, whose father, Marshal J. W. Greene, acted as the decoy. Dressed in Mrs. Hardin's clothes, the marshal was at the well drawing a bucket of water when the sound of footsteps caused him to look around. Immediately behind him was John Wesley Hardin. Likely it was a tossup as to which was the more startled, Greene when he saw Hardin, or Hardin when he saw under the split sunbonnet a suntanned face with a long, drooping mustache, instead of the face of his mother.

As gunman and marshal stared at each other, both frozen into immobility by surprise, two men who had been scuffling inside the house scuffled out of the back door and into the yard. That broke the spell. Hardin made for his horse in zero flat, and he and Taylor were speeding away before the men who had set the trap for them had time to pick up their guns.

[The following is a continuation of the account of Comanche and the Hardin Gang, begun in the July, 1963, Quarterly.]

Before John Wesley Hardin and Jim Taylor came to Comanche, Joe Hardin had blackened his reputation and made enemies by crooked land deals. With the aid of an unscrupulous employee in the land office in Austin, Joe and a group of "land pirates" in Kansas with whom he was associated were selling lands and giving bogus titles. Part of these were the so-called "lost lands" of Texas, lands given by the state in grants and not yet claimed by the owner or his heirs.

Soon after Joe and the Dixon brothers had been placed under technical arrest, Sheriff Carnes went to Joe's home to search for the seals furnished Joe and his associates by their confederate in the land office in Austin.

Carnes searched the cabin-a log cabin and a lean-to-without finding the seals. He was about to leave when he intercepted a glance that passed between Mrs. Hardin and a woman of the Hardin clan in the room with her. This glance told him the seals were in the house. There was only one more place to look-the bed. Mrs. Hardin was lying on that, having given birth to a baby a few days earlier. "I'll have to search your bed," Sheriff Carnes told Mrs. Hardin. Her face showed her alarm. "I'm sick. I can't get up," she protested. The bed had to be searched. Carnes stooped and ran his hand either under or between the mattresses. As he did so, Mrs. Hardin got up screaming and fighting. But the sheriff had what he had been looking for: eleven seals, in a small mahogany box.

Someone has told that in the box with the seals was a watch, the property of a man who had been killed in Austin. Ex-Sheriff Carnes himself told me about finding the seals but he did not mention the watch. Likely the watch was, as a member of the Carnes family recalled, found not with the seals but in a ball of carpet rags.

According to the story Sheriff Carnes had gone to Preacher Hardin's home to question members of the family. Mrs. Hardin was sewing carpet rags. The ball either fell from her lap or it was already on the floor near the feet of the sheriff. While talking with the women, the sheriff began moving the ball around idly with one of his feet. It seemed to him heavier than it should have been. The sudden stillness in the room, the nervousness the women betrayed, caused him to wonder. He picked the ball up and began to unwind it. "Why are you doing that?" one of the women asked. "I don't know," returned the sheriff. "I'll just unwind it, then wind it back again." In the center of the ball was a watch.

During the years that E. J. Davis- a Texan who fought for the Union-was governor of Texas, Hardin's one-man war against the hated State Police, together with the standing of the Hardin family, gained sympathy for the young gunman that he would not have had otherwise. After he killed a man, about all he had to do was to put spurs to his horse

and gallop to the home of some relative or friend, where he would be hidden until the excitement was over. Then he was free to sally forth and kill another man, or maybe three or four.

But in 1874, with the defeat of Davis and the inauguration of Governor Richard Coke, law and order were restored to Texas. The State Police, with which Davis had planned to keep himself in power, were succeeded by two organizations of Rangers. One, known as the Special Force of Rangers, was stationed on the Rio Grande to put down banditry there. A larger force, known officially as the Frontier Battalion, was made up of mobile companies sent wherever needed.

When Webb was killed, several mobile companies of Rangers were sent to Comanche. These were put under the command of A. E. "Bill" Waller, Captain of Company A of the Frontier Battalion. Their orders were to capture Hardin and Taylor at all cost.

Hardin has written bitterly of Waller in his autobiography:

The sheriff told him [Waller] he could and would arrest me whenever he was sure he could protect me. He tried to get Waller to assist him in doing this, but Waller was really the captain of a 'vigilant' band and would not do it. Even my father and brother told Waller that if he would himself guarantee me protection I would come in and surrender. Waller would guarantee nothing, but persisted in hunting me with his mob, composed of the enemies of all law and order. He aroused the whole country and had about 500 men scouting for me, whose avowed purpose was to hang me. With Hardin's reputation as a killer, it might cause a man to raise his eyebrows a trifle over his classification of the men under Waller as "his mob, composed of enemies of all law and order."

In addition to the Rangers, posses from several counties were after Hardin, Taylor, Barekman, and Anderson. Some months ago, Sam Todd wrote me about a fight that took place between two of the posses, one from Brown County, the other from Comanche. This may have been the fight to which Hardin was referring when he wrote in his autobiography that, "Once, two scouting parties met and fired upon each other, keeping it up for two hours until each drew off for reinforcements."

In the fall of 1890, Sam and a friend were hunting deer on a ranch eight or so miles southwest of Comanche. Pleas Couch, the owner of the ranch, pointed to a cabin about a hundred yards away. "Sam, I want you to inspect that cabin," he said. "In 1874 it was a hide-out for the notorious John Wesley Hardin. You've heard about the fight between the Brown County deputy sheriff and the Comanche officers of the law. Well, that cabin is where it took place."

When they went to the cabin, Couch pointed out a few bullet holes still to be seen in the two heavy doors and a number of slugs in the tough rawhide lumber. When they went inside the cabin he showed Sam a trap door that opened into a cellar large enough to hold four or five men. Then he told Sam of the fight between the two posses.

Both posses had learned that the cabin was being used as a hideout by the men they were pursuing. Each decided to raid it the same day, without acquainting the other of its plans. The posse from Brown County arrived at the cabin first, and was inside questioning its occupants when the posse from Comanche rode up. On seeing the horses, the posse from Comanche mistook them for those of the Hardin gang and opened fire. The posse from Brown County fired back, thinking that it was being attacked by Hardin and his men. Several men were wounded but none killed before the two posses awoke to their mistake.

While the fight was going on, Hardin, Taylor, Barekman, and Anderson were supposedly hiding in the cellar, the occupants of the cabin having pulled a bed over the trap door hiding it from view. That the fight took place is true. Whether the outlaws were actually hiding in the cellar when it occurred, or whether that part was added to give interest to the story, is hard to say.

Hardin and his fellow fugitives had been staying together at night but scouting in the day, so as to keep informed of the movements of their pursuers. Cut off from all communication with the Hardin family, hunted by a larger force and more relentlessly than they had ever been hunted before, Hardin and Taylor decided to leave Comanche County.

Hardin had become vexed with Barekman and Anderson because of his inability to awaken them to the danger they were in. On the first day of June he lost patience with them completely. He could not get them to stake their horses. That night the horses wandered off and were taken by a posse camped about 600 yards from the outlaws.

Believing that the posse would attack them at daybreak, Hardin advised that they change camps at once. They did this, Barekman and Anderson leaving on foot, carrying their saddles to a place near a spring Hardin had designated; Hardin and Taylor riding off to get some saddle horses that Joe had running loose. When Hardin and Taylor came to the spring with two of Joe's best horses, Hardin told his cousins that he and Taylor were leaving the country. "If you want to go with us, say 'yes,' and say it quickly," he said. But Barekman and Anderson wanted to stay near Comanche, where Barekman had a wife and baby. When they separated, they never met again.

On June 5, Joe Hardin sent for Mart Fleming, whose friendship with Bob Hardin in Brenham had led to a friendship between Preacher Hardin and Fleming's family. Joe told Mart he wanted to see his wife and babies, the youngest of whom was born after Joe and the Dixon brothers had been placed under technical arrest.

Mart arranged to have Joe paroled to him and escorted the latter to his home. Just before they got to the house, Mart stopped. "I don't want to go into the house with you, Joe. I think you should have the privilege of seeing your family and talking with your wife alone. I'll give you that privilege and wait outside here if you will promise me that when an hour is up you'll come back to me."

"I'll give you my word," said Joe.

The land in back of Joe's cabin was uncleared. Bushes and undergrowth grew to the very edge of the small, unfenced back yard. If Joe had a confederate with a fast horse waiting for him, he might have gone from the back door into the uncleared land and escaped. But at the end of the hour he rejoined Mart and was escorted back to the jail.

The day that Joe Hardin had the short visit with his family, Sheriff Carnes rode into Comanche in the late afternoon tired to the bone from having been out all day with a posse. A boy of about sixteen was waiting for him. Barekman and Anderson were hiding in the Big Thicket, the lad told the sheriff. He had seen them while looking for some cows. Bill Stone was providing them with food.

Forgetting his weariness, Carnes gathered a small posse and set out for Bill Stone's home. In relating what took place, he mentioned only three men besides himself: Mart Fleming, Dave Cunningham, and Henry Ware.

The people of Comanche were divided in their opinion about Henry Ware, a Canadian. With some he rated well; with others, he was looked upon as a killer. On this occasion, he merely rode up and fell in with the posse without being asked-and without being wanted, if the expression of Sheriff Carnes when he told the story was an index to his feelings.

The men were in no mood for conversation. As they rode through the darkness, there was no sound to break the silence except the hoofbeats and the creak of saddles, interspersed now and then by the hoot of an owl, the howl of a coyote, and the mournful lowing of a cow. The Bill Stone ranch was in a clearing in the area of Walnut and Bucksnort Creeks. It was three or four miles from the Big Thicket, known locally today as the Devil's Truck Patch-acre upon acre of scrub oaks, with an under growth of briars and poison ivy, in the Leon River bottom about twelve miles from Comanche. Though it was early June, the night was chilly and a fire was burning in the fireplace when the posse arrived at the Bill Stone cabin. If there was anyone at home except Stone and his wife, Carnes did not mention the fact.

It was like pulling eyeteeth to get Stone to talk. After considerable prodding he told reluctantly that Barekman and Anderson had come to the Big Thicket to hide until they could get guns and ammunition, after which they were going to make a break for Mexico. An overflow of the Leon River had forced them to seek another hiding place. After more prodding, Stone gave the location of the thicket to which they had moved, one of several in the same vicinity.

Since it was useless to search the thicket before day, the posse spent the night at Stone's cabin. At the first hint of day, the posse went to the spot where the outlaws were supposed to be in hiding. Most of the men were familiar with the lay of the land, and plans had already been made. Certain men were to search the thicket. Others were to be stationed in the creek, above and below the thicket, to cut off the escape of

Barekman and Anderson by way of Bucksnort Crossing. Henry Ware and Deputy Sheriff Dave Cunningham were among the men to search the thicket. Sheriff Carnes and Mart Fleming were among those to be stationed in the bed of the creek.

The men stationed in the creek listened intently for the sound of excited voices, a shouted command, something that would tell the results of the search being conducted in the thicket. After what seemed to them an interminable length of time, the men came to the conclusion that Barekman and Anderson, if they had ever been in the thicket, had escaped before the posse got there. Sheriff Carnes climbed far enough up the bank to take a cautious look around. Then he beckoned to his companions. Straight ahead, in the bend of the creek, was a small oak grove. Grazing nearby were two horses. With their horses there, the men they were hunting were not far away.

A few minutes after Carnes and his companions returned to their posts they heard a shot, followed by others. Then came the sound of excited voices and of men crashing through underbrush, more shots, and the screams and curses of wounded men. The sounds did not come from the thicket, but from the oak grove. By the time Sheriff Carnes and his companions reached the spot, Barekman was breathing his last near the bank of the creek and Anderson lay in its bed, his body riddled by bullets.

As the men learned later, the members of the posse who were to search the thicket did so without finding any trace of the outlaws. Then Deputy Sheriff Dave Cunningham, a little in advance of the other men, started to the oak grove. As he was about to enter it he heard a man yawn as if still half-asleep. Cunningham stopped. Looking in the direction from which the yawn had come, he saw Barekman and Anderson stretched out on the ground, heads on their saddles, guns by their sides.

In making a half-turn to motion to the men following him, Cunningham stepped on a dry twig. At the crackling sound made by the twig as it broke, the man who had yawned shot at the deputy sheriff. The other man and Cunningham fired about the same time. The sound of the shots brought Cunningham's companions to the grove in a run.

Today a bluff over which Anderson is supposed to have fallen is known locally as "Murderer's Bluff." A legend, which like most legends hits the truth only in high places, has grown up around the spot. According to the legend, the bluff is a place where many men met their death. One was a desperado who, when cornered, jumped off the bluff and broke his back. Before dying he managed to kill the sheriff, who had poked his head a little too far over the cliff.

The bodies of Barekman and Anderson were placed in a wagon and the posse started back to Comanche. On the way they were met by a runner bringing the news that while they were gone Joe Hardin and the Dixon brothers had been lynched by vigilantes.

After having several brushes with posses and Rangers, John Wesley Hardin and Jim Taylor reached the home of "Fancy" Jim Taylor, who lived in the cedar brakes six miles

northwest of Austin. Taylor was sick from dysentery; Hardin was suffering from the wound he received from Webb, which had had little chance to heal.

On the night of June 7, Charlie and Alf Day and the cook with the herd Hardin and Taylor had started up the trail under Brokius, rode up to "Fancy" Jim's home. They had bad news to report. Doc Brokius, suspecting nothing, had gone to Comanche to report to Hardin and Taylor that the herd of cattle he was driving up the trail had reached Hamilton. He was arrested and put in jail. Rangers had gone to Hamilton, confiscated the cattle and had arrested the cowboys, and they too were in jail. The only ones to escape were the three who had carried the news to "Fancy" Jim's.

Had the three been able to look ahead, they might have told Hardin and Taylor that when the cowhands were sent back to DeWitt County all, except Brokius, were promptly lynched. Brokius escaped by being snatched up and hidden under a voluminous coat by the man who rode away with him. Reasons for the lynching are unknown. Possibilities include the presence of stolen cattle in the herd and an extension of the Sutton-Taylor feud.

The three who had brought the bad news to Hardin and Taylor had still more to report. On June 5, a mob had hanged Joe Hardin and Tom and Bud Dixon, and had shot Ham Anderson and Alec Barekman as "they lay asleep on their pallets in Bill Stone's home."

Hardin wrote as follows:

Jim Taylor was sick and hardly able to ride, so we agreed to separate, as he wanted to go to Gonzales. Alf Day was his nephew and went with him.

I went on the night of the 8th to the Colorado River with them and saw them safely through the city of Austin. I bade Jim Taylor good bye there for the last time and divided my purse with him, giving ten $20 gold pieces to help him along.

I went back to Fancy Jim's, changed horses and with a friend, Rodgers, started back for Comanche.

We rode mostly at night and rested during the day. We got to old Bud Tatum's about sun down on the 10th, and I sent Rogers [sic] up to Bud's to inquire into the situation. Bud had just come from Comanche and was loaded with information. He confirmed the report of the hanging and killing of my kinfolks. He said that any stranger going to Comanche was liable to be arrested and hung....

Now I was convinced that my brother and relatives had been foully murdered. Up to this time I could not even entertain the idea. I knew that up to the time I killed Webb, no living man stood higher in the estimation of his neighbors as a man or a lawyer than my brother Joe.

Nothing would do me now but to go to Comanche. My companion tried to dissuade me, but in vain. I told him we would go to my father's that night, prowl around and see what we could learn.

About 12 o'clock we got to father's house. We unhitched our horses and unsaddled them back of the field. We then fed them and proceeded cautiously to the house. The last time we had been there was on the 30th of May, when thirty men were guarding the house and had fired on us. Talk about hearing bullets hiss and sing!

This time when Hardin, with Rodgers, went to the well, they saw a man coming there. They waited until the man was within ten steps of them, then Hardin covered the man with his Winchester and told him that his life depended on his actions. Hardin continues:

'For God's sake, John, don't shoot me. I'm staying here on purpose to see you. Your father has employed me to do the work in the house and round the garden patch. Nobody suspects me.'

The man, Dick Wade, told Hardin that a mob of 150 men on the night of the 5th had thrown ropes around the necks of Joe, Bud and Tom Dixon and led them bareheaded and barefooted through the street and out to some post oaks where they had hung them until they were dead. He said that the next day Old Bill Stone had led another band to his ranch and had shot to death Ham Anderson and Alec Barekman while they were sleeping on a pallet in his home.

I asked him where they buried Joe and he showed me where he lay buried between two live oaks. I stayed there by my brother's grave and sent Dick to town to see my father. ...

Father and Dick talked the matter over, but father thought it imprudent for him to come and see me. He told Dick to tell me that Jane and Molly, with Barekman's family, were guarded to keep them from giving any possible information. "Tell him,' he said, 'that if they find out he is in the country they will kill me and wind up the family. Tell him not to surrender under any circumstances."

So Dick came back to my brother's grave about 3 a.m. He told me all my father had said. Right there over my brother's grave I swore to avenge my brother's death, and could I but tell you what I have done in that way, without laying myself liable, you would think I have kept my pledge well. While I write this, I say from the deepest depths of my heart that my desire for revenge is not satiated, and if I live another year, I promise my friends and my God to make another of my brother's murderers bite the dust. Just as long as I can find one of them and know for certain that he participated in the murder of my brother, just that and nothing more, right there, the consequences, what they may, I propose to take life.

Hardin's information about the hanging of Joe Hardin and the Dixon brothers was no more accurate, however, than his knowledge of the Barekman-Anderson shooting.

"Mr. Bonner, were there any men from Comanche among the vigilantes who hanged Joe Hardin and the Dixon brothers?" When I asked that question some forty years ago I did not know that I was asking it of one of the two men who had gone on guard shortly before the prisoners were taken from the jail. Mr. Bonner replied readily, I don't think so, I've always believed that the men were from Brown and Coleman Counties-friends of Webb's.

Guards had just been changed at the two-story rock building on the east side of the square that we used for a jail. John James and I were on watch. Two posses were out that night. The moon was shining, and James and I thought nothing about it when we saw, I'd say, about ten or twelve men riding quietly across the square in the direction of the jail. The first thing I knew, the leader was poking a double-barreled shotgun in my face. The end looked as big as the end of a stovepipe. James and I were told to stack our guns. The men meant business, and there was nothing else for us to do.

Some of the men went inside the jail, gagged Joe and the Dixons and brought them out. They went about their work so quietly that neither the boys James and I relieved, nor some Rangers sleeping on the second floor of the jail heard a sound.

There are two accounts of a fourth man who was taken from the jail with Joe Hardin and the Dixon brothers. In one, he is spoken of as a man, Jim Anderson, who, when taken outside the jail, was questioned by the leader of the vigilantes, then told to leave the country and never come back. In the other account, given by Mrs. Minta Holmsley, no name is mentioned and the "man" was spoken of as a "boy." In this account, the boy was questioned by the leader, who then wrote a note to Captain Jim Holmsley, Mrs. Holmsley's husband, asking him to take care of the boy until he could get him safely out of the country. This was done.

There is confusion today as to where Joe Hardin and the Dixon brothers were hanged. Some think they were hanged in the public square of Comanche. Others believe they were hanged near Oakwood Cemetery, where the Bailey brothers, who killed a deputy United States marshal, were lynched around 1883. Still others think they were hanged near Preacher Hardin's home.

According to a letter from Robert T. Hill published in the Comanche Chief on August 11, 1933, they were hanged two or three miles southwest of Comanche, the direction in which the vigilantes, if from Brown and Coleman Counties, would have been riding when returning to their homes. This is substantiated by the late Camille Fleming, whose father, Mart Fleming cut the bodies down with the help of two Negro men who worked for him and made the crude coffins in which the dead men were buried.

The Dixon brothers were chained together and were hanged on the same tree; Joe Hardin was hanged on a tree nearby. Joe's funeral services, and probably the funeral services of the others, were conducted by "Parson" Peter Gravis, a Methodist circuit rider who lived in Comanche. The feeling in the town must have been high. Gravis was threatened by a mob for holding the services.

Years later, the Hardin property came into the possession of William Barnes, a hardware merchant of Comanche. When the family was ready to build a home, Mrs. Barnes was set against "living with the ghosts of the Hardin gang." Mr. Barnes hired two men, whose identity he never revealed. The men went to the former Hardin home and exhumed what was left of the victims of the hanging-some boot heels, buttons, belt buckles, and a few of the larger bones. These were put in a large wooden dry goods box, and the box was buried in Oakwood Cemetery, the burial place of Alec Barekman and Ham Anderson.

The news that Joe Hardin and the Dixon brothers had been lynched threw Comanche into a panic. No matter who hanged them, the town would get the blame. Rumors of threats made by John Wesley Hardin were not calculated to ease the fears of the people. He was going to burn the town. He was going to kill ten men each for his two cousins who had been hanged, and twenty men for his brother. Since the young gunman could not be hanged any "deader" for burning a town and adding forty more notches to his gun than for those already there, his threat was not looked upon as an idle one.

The town was guarded. There being no other way to light the square, fires were kept burning at night. Women were told to stay at home-not that there was any great need for such an order. Not since the days of Indian raids were women less inclined to venture out.

One woman said, I was a schoolgirl at the time. I was so scared that I slept under the bed, instead of on top of it, my head sticking out so I could watch all the time. When Hardin went away, he said he hadn't done half of what he was going to do to Comanche. He was coming back, tear the place down and burn it.

Fresh rumors kept pouring into the town to add to the fright of the already terrified populace. Hardin had killed another man. Hardin and fifteen or twenty followers were making ready to raid the town. Young Jeff Hardin was threatening to ride in blood up to his bridle reins to avenge the death of Joe.

While the excitement was at its height my father had a ride he had reason to remember. He had tuberculosis. His doctor had advised him to move west, to a country with a higher altitude and a drier climate than that of Galveston. In October, prior to the killing of Webb, he had moved with my mother and two small children to a settlement fourteen miles from Comanche, where he had a country store.

A few months later, a Dr. Maxon, who was looking for a place to locate, came to the same settlement. He was staying at the home of my parents when he became seriously ill. He needed a doctor, and needed him urgently. It was at night and at a time when a man riding alone at night ran the risk of being shot by desperados or by men whose nerves were so jittery they were likely to shoot first and ask questions afterward.

My father's horse was in a gallop when he rode into Comanche. Men guarding the square met him, guns in their hands. When they learned his errand he was directed to a doctor. There were three doctors in Comanche. Two refused to endanger their lives by riding to the settlement through the darkness. The third went because my father would not take "no" for an answer.

There were certain men in Comanche against whom the Hardin gang felt especially bitter. One of these was Captain Jim Holmsley, who had come to Comanche with his parents when the land was still the winter range of the Comanche Indians. Some years after Captain Holmsley died, his widow, Minta, recalled the following incident.

One night Georgia Carnes, a sister of Sheriff John Carnes, was spending the night with her. One of the children woke during the night and wanted a drink of water. Afraid to go downstairs alone, Mrs. Holmsley, a young mother, and Georgia, a schoolgirl, went downstairs together. As they stepped off the stairway they were confronted by two men who had been hiding behind it. "Go back upstairs," the men ordered.

Their presence having been discovered, the men slipped out of the house and hid in a ditch, where the imprint of their bodies could be seen the next morning. Had Captain Holmsley returned home his usual way he would have passed the ditch and perhaps been wounded or killed. That night-because of a presentiment, maybe, or because he had been warned-he came home through the orchard and entered the house through the back door.

Hardin had planned to get help from his cowboys at Hamilton. This was knocked in the head by the arrest of Brokius, followed by the confiscation of his cattle and the arrest of others of his cowhands by Rangers. He made his way to Gonzales, hid for a short time among friends, then had to flee from another sheriff's posse. He then went to the home of an uncle near Brenham. While there, he sent his uncle to Kansas to sell the cattle he had sent up the trail under his cousin Joe Clements. This done, he got ready, he thought, to shake the dust of Texas off his feet for good.

In late 1876, Captain John Armstrong, having brought cattle rustlers on the Rio Grande under control, turned his attention to Hardin. The man he called to help him was Captain Jack Duncan, formerly of Dallas. Duncan at one time had been a Chicago detective. He had an excellent reputation in the Southwest. Hardin was arrested the morning of August 23, 1877, in Pensacola, Florida. The spectacular arrest was front-page news through- out the South and Southwest.

Hardin had been living in Pollard, a town in Southern Alabama, where there was only an imaginary line between Escambia County, Alabama, and Escambia, Florida. His wife had a nest of relatives living in or around Pollard, one of whom was Neal McMellon, sheriff of Escambia County. Two attempts to rescue Hardin were made by friends and relatives of his wife, but Armstrong and Duncan thwarted both.

A night was spent by Hardin in the Memphis jail. The stories in the Memphis papers brought a large crowd to the railroad station when the Rangers and their prisoner resumed their journey the next morning. That Hardin had won the sympathy of thousands was shown by the spirit of the crowd that turned out to see him. At Texarkana it was necessary to get special guards to keep the crowd back. From Texarkana to Austin, people gathered on the platforms to wait for hours. In Austin, one could not get a hotel room at any price. All sorts of talk was heard in the crowd: people were going to lynch Hardin; friends were going to set him free. The situation at the capital was tense.

Armstrong and Duncan fooled everybody and cheated the crowd out of getting a glimpse of the gunman by stopping the train just outside Austin and putting their prisoner in a curtained hack. Then, surrounded by Rangers, they drove him to the jail. When they got there, the crowd was so thick that the Rangers had to pick Hardin up and carry him over their heads into the jail.

The Texas papers gave long accounts of the arrest of Hardin. In these they gave credit for assisting Armstrong and Duncan in making the arrest to Sheriff W. H. Hutchinson of Escambia County, Florida; his deputy, A. J. Purdue; and W. D. Chipley, general manager of the Pensacola Railroad.

In an interview published in the Austin Statesman on August 29, 1877, Hardin told that he was sick and tired of fleeing from the law, and would not go away if he could. But in less than no time he was trying to escape. He had almost cut through the bars of the Travis County jail when he was caught.

Hardin remained in jail in Austin until late September, 1877. He was not idle while there. He asked help of everybody he thought in a position to give it, and an amazing number of people came to his aid.

The first efforts of Hardin and his friends were directed toward keeping him from being tried in Comanche. But the Webb case seemed to hold the best evidence for conviction and the officials were determined that he be tried on that. After exhausting every political power in the state and gaining nothing, his friends furnished him with good attorneys, with the hope of getting an acquittal or a short term in prison.

Hardin said in his autobiography:

I stayed in Austin jail until the latter part of September, and then a company of Rangers (No. 35) commanded by N. O. Reynolds and accompanied by Sheriff Wilson and his deputies escorted me to Comanche.

The reason I was guarded by such a strong escort was because they were afraid that the brutal mob who had hung my relatives would hang me....

I rode in a buggy with Sheriff Wilson, the most of the company in front and the lesser part bringing up the rear. We camped out every night and my escort did everything in their power to make me comfortable, except that they kept me securely shackled and

cuffed. On arriving at Comanche, my escort marched up, waited for me to be carried into the jail, as I was too heavily shackled to walk. Reynolds placed a guard around the jail and went out to see what the situation was. He soon found that feeling was very violent against me and that there were 200 men camped two miles from town for the purpose of hanging me.

In August, 1933, Robert T. Hill, for many years a prominent geologist for the United States Geological Survey, was spending a few days in Comanche, where he had lived about eight years as a youth. The Texas Ex-Rangers Association was holding a reunion there. The presence of the Rangers put Hill in a mood for reminiscing.

He wrote in an article for the Comanche Chief:

I saw another procession on the Goldthwaite road down which we looked. It was an old time wagon with the cover thrown back over the rear bows. In the center a heavily ironed man rode, seated in a chair. An escort of twenty rangers rode before, behind, and beside him.

The man was John Wesley, being brought back to Comanche for trial. He received a sentence of twenty-five years in the penitentiary, a light sentence for a man who had killed so many. But Hardin wanted to be free. From the moment he entered the penitentiary at Huntsville he began plotting to escape. Each attempt was thwarted and all called for severe punishment. He spent hours in a dungeon on bread and water. He was flogged until his back and sides were raw and bleeding.

These futile efforts to escape went on for fifteen years. Then a man who had shown an interest in Hardin and in whom the gunman had confidence told him if he would change his ways a pardon might be granted. For the remainder of the time that he was in prison, a year and five months, Hardin seems to have been a model prisoner.

Hardin was pardoned by Governor J. S. Hogg and was released from prison on February 17, 1894. The petitions seeking his release-there were many of them-show the names of men prominent in building the Southwest.

Hardin's wife, the one stabilizing influence in his life, had died in November, 1892. He went to Gonzales and joined his children, who, since the death of their mother, had been making their home with Hardin's old and trusted friend, Fred Duderstadt.

Hardin had studied law the last month he was in prison. He completed his study and was admitted to the bar. During the year that he lived in Gonzales he entered politics, lining up with the forces opposing W. E. Jones for sheriff. Jones had helped Hardin escape from the Gonzales jail in the fall of 1872. If Jones would help one man escape, he would help others, so reasoned Hardin. Jones denied the charge brought by Hardin, and the feeling between the two men became extremely bitter.

When the votes were counted, Jones had won over Coleman, the candidate Hardin had supported, by only 9 votes. Hardin had declared that if Jones were elected he would leave Gonzales and never go back. Possibly one reason he reached this decision was that the years he spent in prison had, in a measure, cost him the love of his children. They felt closer to Fred Duderstadt than to their father.

In the summer of 1895, Hardin married a young girl, Callie Lewis of London, Texas. Something, perhaps the teasing remarks that Jeff Hardin made about the difference in age between the bride and the groom, turned the girl against Hardin. She never lived with him. Hardin stayed in or around London for a time, hoping that the girl would change her mind. Then he drifted on, finally landing in El Paso.

He could not have gone to a tougher or more dangerous town than El Paso was at that time. Many of the killers, cattle thieves, and outlaws who wanted to go on with their old game had drifted to El Paso. With a little advance warning-and there were those who would give it-any hunted man could dash from the city limits across the Rio Grande into Mexico and, in Juarez, thumb his nose at Texas and United States civil authorities. Just over the Texas line New Mexico was also ready to furnish El Paso with its share of lawbreakers.

It is likely that Hardin came out of prison with the intention of putting his past behind him. But everything seems to have gone wrong with him. His children were estranged from him; the fling he had taken in politics had shattered his dreams as a lawyer in Gonzales; his marriage in London, Texas, had been a blow to his pride.

Hardin went to El Paso to finish his autobiography. When he got there he found himself again "somebody." He was John Wesley Hardin, who had more notches on his gun than anyone else. Bad men, on sufficiently good terms to talk with one another, flattered him. They talked of his skill with a gun. Lowering their voices, they talked of Hardin and Selman, a constable of El Paso. Sooner or later there would be trouble between the two. The town was not big enough to hold both.

A story of Selman that shows him to have been a worse man than Hardin comes from R. A. Slack, who lived in Comanche forty years and in 1921 moved to Dallas, where he died some twenty years later. The story came to me through Mrs. J. H. Marshall, one of Slack's daughters.

Before moving to Comanche, Slack had led a colorful life. He had been a trail driver, a buffalo hunter, and he was on guard at the jail in Albany when Selman's partner and associate in crime was shot to death by a mob.

The counties west of Albany had not yet been organized and a number of them were attached to Shackelford County for governmental purposes. The county judge and the sheriff had jurisdiction over them. Sheriff Bill Krueger always had as prisoners a lot of desperate men gathered from the vast territory over which he operated, and no jail in

which to keep them. He held them with cocked guns in a little box, the flimsy walls of which the weakest inmate could have kicked through in a minute.

At that time farming was crowding the cattlemen out of Dallas, Collin, Kaufman, and other counties, and the cattlemen in that section were moving their herds west. The men who had the contract to supply the soldiers and the Tonkawa Indians at Fort Griffin with dressed beef found it more profitable to cull their beeves from the herds of the incoming cattlemen than to pay for their stock, as had been their custom. It was said that the thieves would butcher the cattle on the banks of the Brazos River and throw their hides into the river. When caught up with by the owners of the cattle or by their cowboys, the thieves would kill them and throw their bodies where they had thrown the hides of the beeves. These outlaws, who had murdered a number of men, were dead shots and defied the officers. Sheriff Bill Krueger moved with the utmost caution against them. One night he caught one of the men at home. With his deputies and a posse of citizens he surrounded the man's horse lot and waited for him to come out in the morning. Just at daylight the man crept out unarmed. Instantly he found fifty guns leveled on him. He put up his hands.

Sheriff Krueger placed the man in his shell of a prison and told Slack to guard him until ten o'clock that night when his brother, Henry Krueger, and Joe Poe, Deputy City Marshal of Fort Griffin, would relieve him. Early that night the prisoner told Slack that he had 1,500 dollars in his pocket which he would give him if he would let him escape before midnight, that a mob would be at the jail at that hour to lynch him. Slack refused the bribe.

When Slack went off guard at ten o'clock he retired to a little side room and went to sleep on a bunk. Sometime later he was aroused by a prod in the ribs with a six-shooter. Looking up, he found himself surrounded by masked men who already had seized his arms.

The mob entered the prison and riddled with bullets the man with the 1,500 dollars. "He was the gamest man I ever saw." Slack said later. "He smiled placidly on the mob as they shot him to pieces." The strange thing about the outrage was that more than half of the prisoners they had under guard that night thought that the mob had come for them individually. "Hurricane Bill," in Slack's opinion "one of the wildest men we ever had in the west," was among them. When he heard the clatter of the gathering mob, he remarked, "It would be a pity for them to bloody up my nice pallet, so I'll just get up."

John Selman, the other man the mob wanted, succeeded in escaping. He lived in Brownwood for a time in the 1870's and was frequently seen in Comanche. As these towns became too civilized for him and others like him, he went farther west. Eventually he turned up in El Paso, where he became a peace officer and soon made himself recognized as the bad man of the place.

Several years ago the late Otis Coles, a long-time resident of El Paso, gave a talk about John Wesley Hardin before the Pioneer Association of El Paso. While Coles and Hardin moved in different social circles, their paths crossed a few times in the year 1896. Coles arrived in El Paso that year as night clerk at the old Pierson Hotel.

Coles recalled that,

John Wesley Hardin came into the hotel and asked if another clerk, a man named Walter Seamon, was there. I asked, 'What do you want to see him about?' Hardin said, 'That is my business.' The other clerk supposedly had mistreated one of Hardin's friends. I thought that Hardin might be gunning for him, so I got word to the other boy to skin out.

Hardin's introduction to El Paso was to go into a gambling hall -either the Gem or the Wigwam-and after gambling pull a six- gun and order the dealer to give him back all he had lost. He pulled a lot of shines like that. But there was at least one man in El Paso who was not afraid of him. That man was Jeff Milton, chief of police. Milton wasn't afraid of anybody. I ran across the two on the street one night. Milton was telling Hardin what he was going to do if he didn't behave.

Hardin had started drinking again after he went to El Paso. One night when he was playing cards an acquaintance called him aside. The police had arrested "his woman," he was told, a Mrs. Martha McRose *(actually Helen Beulah Williams M'roz)*, whose husband had been slain the month before by Chief Milton and George Scarborough, a Deputy United States Marshal.

"Who arrested her," demanded Hardin, "and for what?" "Young John Selman, on a charge of vagrancy and carrying a pistol." Hardin, enraged, checked out of the card game and went to the police station, where he posted bond and freed Mrs. McRose.

While young John Selman, a policeman, was the target for Hardin's rage, the talk around the bars was that the end would come with old John Selman taking a stand in place of his son, particularly if the quarrel was to be settled with pistols. When the end came, old John gave Hardin no chance to defend himself. About 11 P.M. on August 19, 1895, Hardin was drinking and shaking dice in the Acme Saloon with H. S. Brown, an El Paso grocer. He stood with his back to the front door. A few minutes later old John Selman appeared in the saloon door.

"Four sixes to beat," Hardin said. They were the last words he uttered. Taking careful aim, Selman shot Hardin in the back of his head. He kept on shooting until Hardin crumpled to the floor, dead.

"Selman claimed that Hardin reached for a gun," Coles said, "but nobody believed him. Before Selman turned lawman, he had been a cold-blooded killer himself."